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TELEGRAM

July 16, 2003

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 3300 - ROUTINE)
TAGS: PREL, KPAO
Captions: None
Subject: AMBASSADOR SPEAKS OUT ON MEPI
Ref: None

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 03300

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INFO: FCS
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ACTION: ECON
INFO: P/M AMB DCM POL

DISSEMINATION: ECON
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INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE

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DEPT FOR NEA/IPA, NEA/ARP, NEA/PD AND NEA/RA
E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: KPAO PREL TC
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR SPEAKS OUT ON MEPI

¶1. **Summary:** In the last two weeks, the Ambassador has used a number of public fora, including the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research and the UAE Diplomatic Institute, to explain and promote the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) and related initiatives such as the Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA) and Partnerships for Learning. In contrast to the chilly reception that such approaches received upon MEPI's introduction, our UAE interlocutors and audiences are now not only receptive to but also eager for information about how MEPI will work and what it can do for them. These discussions highlighted the opportunities offered by MEPI for institution-building on many levels, and received positive coverage in local Arabic print media.

¶2. **(RECOMMENDATION:** As MEPI, MEFTA, P4L and our other

initiatives in the region gain momentum, there will be increased demand here for information on them and a need for USG officials and those actually involved in MEPI programs to speak out more. Post welcomes the recently issued fact sheets on MEPI but notes that to date only one has been issued in Arabic. We need materials in Arabic available simultaneously with the English to support effective outreach on MEPI. Interest is high, but we must have effective tools with which to meet it. END
RECOMMENDATION) End summary

¶3. On July 7, the Ambassador spoke at a round table at the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research on MEPI and MEFTA. The event was well attended by the Emirati community, including Sheikh Hamid Bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, Presidential son and Head of the Abu Dhabi Department of the Economy. Sheikh Hamid asked whether MEFTA would also encourage intra-Arab trade, still very low, and asked how to initiate a Free Trade Agreement. Questions were thoughtful and related to the implementation of MEPI, in particular economic issues. The head of the government-owned Emirates News Agency (WAM) praised a recent media training program conducted by PAO for WAM staff, requesting that more such programs be conducted under MEPI and volunteering the UAE as a venue for regional media training. (NOTE: Post highly recommends that the MEPI office consider this proposal, which offers an opportunity not only to increase professionalism in the media but also to insure more accurate reporting on US policy.) The only really negative comment came from one journalist commenting that "Arab intellectuals" fear that the Middle East Free Trade Area was a back door attempt by the USG to benefit the economy of Israel. The Ambassador dismissed these speculations out of hand.

¶4. On July 14, the Ambassador also gave a similar presentation, in Arabic, to a group of 23 young UAE diplomats, among them four women, plus three UAE Ambassadors at the newly-established Emirates Diplomatic Institute. Headed by veteran UAE diplomat Dr. Yousuf al-Hassan, the Institute has drawn upon the example of NFATC and diplomatic training institutes in other countries in designing its curricula. Dr. Hassan has expressed great interest in learning more about MEPI and its practical applications. He was among the first officials to whom post reached out to explain MEPI after its launch, and he organized a seminar on MEPI shortly after our first visit to him. (We noted that the tremendous skepticism Dr. al-Hassan voiced about MEPI initially has moderated noticeably.)

¶5. In her presentation, the Ambassador described MEPI, MEFTA, and P4L, giving examples of programs underway and emphasizing that these new US initiatives were conceived in a spirit of true partnership. The diplomats asked about the starting date and mechanisms for implementation, and the women students inquired about MEPI's potential for women. As on other occasions, we have observed a growing interest in MEPI and a great appetite for information. While there is still suspicion that MEPI is a plot to remake the Arab world in an American image (especially in the highly sensitive area of curricula), there is also genuine interest in the opportunities it offers for student and citizens' exchanges, women and entrepreneurship, trade and political liberalization. A key point of interest to all our audiences is the opening they see to convey a better image of the Arab world and Islam to America and Americans. Many here feel deeply misunderstood and look to MEPI as a vehicle for correcting these misperceptions.

¶6. REQUEST: Post reiterates the request in our MEPI strategy for posts to receive small grant authority so that we can respond to requests for small projects for NGOs, educational institutions, or media training. END REQUEST
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